

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T STATE 086316

FOLLOWING REPEAT SANA 1388 SENT ACTION SECSTATE RPTD INFO
JIDDA AMMAN CAIRO KHARTOUM KUWAIT MUSCAT APRIL 11, 1977.

QUOTE: S E C R E T SANA 1388

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, YE

SUBJECT: HAJRI ASSASSINATION

BEGIN SUMMARY: ASSASSINATION OF YEMENI POLITICAL LEADER
ABDALLAH AL-HAJRI RAISES LARGE QUESTIONS ABOUT STABILITY
AND FOREIGN RELATIONS OF YARG BUT OUR INITIAL ESTIMATE IS
THAT HAMDY WILL BE ABLE TO CONTAIN AND DOMINATE ANY CRISIS.
END SUMMARY.

1. SANA HAS BEEN SHOCKED BY NEWS OF ASSASSINATION IN
LONDON OF ABDALLAH AHMED AL-HAJRI ON 10 APRIL. ACCORDING
TO REPORTS RECEIVED HERE, AL-HAJRI AND HIS WIFE, WHO WERE
IN LONDON FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT, LEFT THEIR HOTEL ABOUT
10:30 IN THE MORNING TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL IN
COMPANY OF YEMENI SOUNSELOR OF EMBASSY, ABDALLAH
AL-HAMMANI. UNKNOWN ASSAILANT -- WHOM BBC SAID EYE-
WITNESSES DESCRIBED AS "APPARENTLY OF MIDDLE EASTERN
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ORIGIN" -- OPENED CAR DOOR AND FIRED PISTOL WITH
SILENCER AT POINT-BLANK RANGE INTO OCCUPANTS.
ASSAILANT THEN MADE HIS ESCAPE THROUGH UNCROWDED
EASTER SUNDAY STREETS INTO HYDE PARK.

2. AL-HAJRI WAS ARCH CONSERVATIVE FIGURE WHOSE CLOSEST
FOREIGN TIES WERE WITH SAUDIS BUT HE WAS WIDELY

RESPECTED AS COMPLETELY FRANK AND HONORABLE OLD MAN
-- WELL INTO HIS 60'S -- WHO HAD SERVED REPUBLIC
LONG AND FAITHFULLY. TRAINED AS A JUDGE, HE FIRMLY
OPPOSED ANY DILUTION OF ISLAMIC CONTENT OF REPUBLIC;
NEVERTHELESS HIS KINDLINESS AND GOOD HUMOR WAS
LEGENDARY. HE SERVED HAMDI AS AN "ADVSIOR" AND AS
SUCH, OUTRANKED EVERY OTHER CIVILIAN IN YARG EXCEPT
PRIME MINISTER. HE WAS WIDELY SEEN AS THE NUMBER
TWO MAN IN GOVERNMENT ALTHOUGH HE WASN'T ON COMMAND
COUNCIL. HE ACCOMPANIED PRESIDENT ON FOREIGN TRIPS,
SAW HIM FREQUENTLY HERE. HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE
BECOME PRESIDENT BY CONSENSUS HAD HAMDI DIED. HE WAS
FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IN PAST AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

3. HAJRI HAD BEEN PICKED BY HAMDI TO SPEARHEAD
SENSITIVE ELECTION EFFORT AND IN THIS CAPACITY HAD
CHAired NUMEROUS MEETINGS AIMED AT SETTING UP BROADLY
BASED GOVERNMENT POLITICAL PARTY.

4. IT IS TOO EARLY TO KNOW MUCH ABOUT ASSASSINATION
BUT IN SANA THIS MORNING TWO THEORIES ARE OFFERED.

5. FIRST AND MOST WIDELY SUPPORTED THEORY IS THAT
ASSASSINATION WAS ENGINEERED BY OUSTED POLTICIANS
LIKE SINAN ABU LUHUM AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER MUHSIN
AL-AYNI WHO ARE IN CAHOOTS WITH NORTHERN TRIBES LED
BY ABDULLAH BIN HUSSAIN AL-AHMAY. POLITICIANS HAVE
LINKS TO IRAQI BAATH AND MOREOVER HAVE IN YARG
AMBASSADOR TO LONDON, MOHAMMED AL-IRYANI, FRIEND AND
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FELLOW EXILE WHO COULD HAVE HELPED WITH INFORMATION
IN ASSASSINATION. YEMENIS POINT TO SILENCER, SINGLE
ASSASSIN, AS PROOF THIS IS PROFESSIONAL JOB LIKE IRAQI
ONE WHICH KILLED MOHAMMED NUMAN IN BEIRUT IN 1975.

6. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS THEORY BUT
ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY ANGRY IN
LAST TWO WEEKS AND AS A RESULT, ROAD TO MARIB AND
ROAD NORTH OF SANA HAVE BEEN CUT TO ALMOST ALL TRAFFIC,
NOT JUST GOVERNMENT VEHICLES. ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN'S
ANGER FLOWS FROM FACT THAT HE MUSTERED VERY LARGE
TRIBAL GROUP AT MARIB TO MEET SHEIKH ZAYID. EYE-
WITNESSES DESCRIBED "HUNDREDS OF TENTS" AROUND MARIB
AIRPORT. HAMDI WOULD HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CREATE
GOVERNMENT PRESENCE IN MARIB IF ZAYID WENT TO SEE
PLANNED UAE PROJECT FOR NEW DAM AT MARIB, AND SO HE
SIMPLY REROUTED SHEIKH ZAYID TO OTHER CITIES IN YEMEN.
ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN LOST GREAT FACE AND ALL HIS RE-
MAINING PATIENCE. WE HAVE REPORTS (FROM POOR SOURCES)

THAT SAADA IS BESEIGED AND TRIBES THROUGHOUT NORTH AND EAST HAVE JOINED FORCES WITH ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN IN REACTION TO HAMDI"COMMUNIST"POLICY OF MEETING AND DEALING WITH SOUTHYEMEN. WE DON'T KNOW HOW SERIOUS TRIBAL INSURRECTION IS BUT THERE ARE PROBLEMS AND WE HAVE BANNED AMERICAN TRAVEL TO OUTLYING AREAS IN NORTH AND EAST.

7. OTHER THEORY IS THAT ASSASSIN WAS DIRECTED FROM SOUTH YEMEN, WHERE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS OPPOSE RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND FEAR HAMDI'S GROWING STRENGTH IN THE NORTH. THE ASSASSINATION WOULD SET RIVAL TRIBAL AND GOVERNMENT GROUPS AGAINST EACH OTHER AT THE SAME TIME AS CREATING DEEP SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE BONA FIDES OF BOTH SOUTH AND SAUDIS TOWARD YEMEN. FACT THAT KILLING OCCURRED WHEN SAUDI FOR MIN SAUD WAS IN SANA TALKING TO HAMDI GIVES DRAMA
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TO THIS THEORY.

8. COMMENT. HAMDI PROBABLY BELIEVES FIRST THEORY. IN HIS LAST TALK WITH AMBASSADOR HE LAMENTED ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH LOWER RANKING SAUDI OFFICIALS HERE GAVE TO TRIBAL FIGURES AND MISINFORMATION WHICH SENT TO RIYADH AS REPORTS ON "LEFTIST" AND "FAITHLESS" HAMDI REGIME. HAMDI ALLUDED IN VEILED TERMS TO STRIKE AGAINST TRIBES, SAYING THAT YARG REFRAINED ONLY AS COURTESY TO SAUDIS. HE ENDED -- AS HE BEGAN -- BY PLEADING FOR US TO INTERVENE FOR YEMEN WITH SAUDIS FOR UNDERSTANDING. THIS IS RATE REQUEST FOR HAMDI, AND SIGNAL TO US OF DEEP CONCERN. LAST SUCH REQUEST WAS IN FALL 1975 WHEN TURKI MISSION, SOVIET ARMS DEAL, HALT IN SAUDI SUBSIDIES, TRIBAL TROUBLES, CAME CLOSE TO FORCING RUPTURE IN RELATIONS.

9. SO POSSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT BASH AT TRIBES, AND PARTICULARLY AT ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN, HAMDI'S DESPISED ARCH RIVAL, IS REAL. HOWEVER, HAMDI WILL MORE LIKELY MOVE BY INDIRECTION IN TIME WITH HIS WELL-ESTABLISHED STYLE. HE WILL TRY TURN GENUINE REVULSION OF YEMENIS AT MURDER OF HAJRI INTO PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR REGIME THROUGH STATE FUNERALS, MEMORIALS, ETC. HE WILL TRY TO DRAW OFF SAUDIS FROM CONTACTS WITH TRIBAL FIGURES AND EAST UP ON BOTH CAMPAIGN AGAINST DOMESTIC LEFT AND ON CONTACTS WITH PDRY. HE WILL BE FIRM WITH TRIBES, BUT NOT ATTACK THEM. HE WILL RESPOND TO TRIBAL ATTACKS WITH GREAT FORCE OF SHORT DURATION. THUS WE SEE HIM REMAINING ON TOP OF ANY CRISIS WHICH MAY DEVELOP, CONTAINING IT AND TRYING TO CONTINUE

HIS WELL-ESTABLISHED POLICY OF BEFRIENDING BOTH
CONSERVATIVE SAUDIS AND RADICAL SOUTHERNERS, BUILDING
STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AT EXPENSE OF BOTH LEFTISTS
AND TRIBES AND RE-ORIENTING YARG FROM SOVIET ASSOCIA-
TIONS IN ARMS AND POLITICS TO CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH
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WESTERN COUNTRIES. SCOTES
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